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## Roasting Plant opens in Detroit with beans flying through tubes

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Detroit's newest high-end coffeehouse is in the core of downtown, but could belong in a science-fiction movie.

When a customer orders, say, a \$2 coffee at the Roasting Plant, 660 Woodward Ave. outside Campus Martius, a computerized system of clear pneumatic tubes transports one of a dozen varieties of exotic beans between a roaster, a vertical network of transparent silos and one of six grinding and brewing machines behind the barista counter.

The beans speed on bursts of compressed air. They travel so fast it is hard to spot them. Yet one can't miss hearing the rush of their overhead journey from silo to brewer to cup. That \$2 made-to-order coffee takes about 60 seconds to get into the customer's hands. There is also espresso.

"The beans literally fly over the customer's head," said Elizabeth Rose, the store's operator. "I know, it's kind of wild."

Detroit is the third Roasting Plant coffee shop and the first location outside of New York City. Situated in the Dan Gilbert-owned First National Building, the shop officially opens today following a "soft opening" this week that was closely followed by nearby Quicken Loans workers.

"This is really unique," said Steve Delfuoco of Ann Arbor, a Quicken employee on a break Wednesday. "It looks more like a mad scientist's hideout than a coffee shop."

Roasting Plant has several patents on its space-age contraption, which was conceived by company founder Mike Caswell as a faster way to move beans and make fresher coffee. A former Starbucks executive (his former title: director of profit improvement), Caswell developed his tubular idea during several years that involved dismantling his grandmother's Electrolux vacuum cleaner.

The first Roasting Plant opened in 2007 in Manhattan's Lower East Side and the second a year later in Manhattan's West Village.

The Detroit location fills ground-floor space that previously housed the Vine Bar.

Rose, a metro Detroit native and 1978 graduate of what is now Cranbrook Kingswood School, said Roasting Plant's journey here began when Gilbert, an enthusiastic downtown booster, was shown a video of the Javabot pneumatic tube machines in action.

Impressed, Gilbert had his staff invite Rose and other Roasting Plant officials for a tour of the city. They were quickly sold on Detroit.

"It's very exciting that they decided to come here instead of branching out further in New York," said Quicken Loans spokeswoman Elizabeth Smith.

For Roasting Plant, the Detroit location is a new flagship store and the model for future expansions in North America, perhaps next in Boston or Chicago. The Detroit Javabot is also the most advanced model to date.

"We're all delighted to be a part of this," Rose said of downtown Detroit's ongoing resurgence. "Some of our New York staff is looking around here, going 'How much are apartments here?'"